

The Independent Review of Victoria's Wildlife Act 1975

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute, not only with this submission but also with the "Wildlife Possession and Trade" forum held on Friday 28th of May. The forum was a great opportunity to express our concerns and ideas with members of the expert panel and the DELWP representatives.

I am making this submission on behalf of the Victorian Herpetological Society as the current president and would like to elaborate on the questions asked during the forum.

What is currently working for you?

Under the current Wildlife Act, we are privileged enough to be able to keep native wildlife as pets. This in itself is a great and rewarding thing. The ability to keep these animals has a positive impact on conservation of wild population as it gives younger generations the chance to learn about and respect these amazing animals. These generations then develop a passion for wildlife and ultimately do what they can to conserve it.

What is currently not working or your concerns?

With the current wildlife schedules being part of the wildlife regulations it makes the process for updating the schedules difficult with ten years between reviews. I understand that a review outside the ten year cycle is possible but with the amount of work involved it is unlikely to ever happen.

If the schedules were moved from the wildlife regulations and made a Governor in Council Order, this would make the process for updating the schedules easier for all parties.

The ability to update the schedules more frequently is important for several reasons that include:

- Taxonomic changes are occurring all the time, with some species being split and new species being discovered.
- To keep up to date with other States and Territories - if wildlife is available from a legal source interstate, why would it not be allowed in Victoria?
- For a long time, Victoria has led the way in Wildlife Possession and Trade - being able to quickly adapt will see Victoria remains that way.

What is missing, what are the opportunities to improve?

Consultation with key stakeholders - we need to reinstate the Wildlife Possession and Trade Advisory Committee (WPTAC).

WPTAC used to meet quarterly and brought together key stakeholders including herpetological groups, mammal groups, bird groups, zoos, dealers and DEWLP. Unfortunately some time ago (approximately eight years) it was decided that these regular meetings should be moved to an adhoc basis and as a result have never been held since. These meeting not only brought like-minded people together but also gave the people a voice and a forum to raise any concerns and share ideas.

It is our opinion that WPTAC needs to be included in the Act to ensure these meetings are structured and held regularly. There are now multiple platforms in which these meetings could be held virtually making them easier for stakeholders to attend.

An online record-keeping and application process also needs to be implemented – the reliance on manual processes is outdated in an increasingly paperless world.

Finally, we would also like to bring your attention to the “Key review date” listed on page 6 of the issues paper.

“A further phase of consultation on the report and government response is anticipated after the panel delivers the final report to the Minister”

This phase of consultation must take place and be communicated to all key stakeholders in a timely manner allowing them the time need to review and provide feedback.

We would like to thank you for taking the time to read our submission and we look forward to the next stage of consultation.

Adam Sapiano

On behalf of the Victorian Herpetological Society